

Social Service Professional or Market Expert?

Maternity Care Relations under Neoliberal Healthcare Reform

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abstract:

Recent developments in the organization and practice of healthcare, driven by the introduction of (quasi-) markets and privatization, are altering traditional forms of professionalism found in high- and middle-income countries.

Yet there remains debate about whether these neoliberal trends are universal or country specific, and whether they have any effect (positive or negative) on health service delivery. This article develops a comparative analysis that focuses on changes in maternity service systems in four countries in Northern Europe and the Americas with primarily publicly financed healthcare systems: the UK, Finland, Chile and Canada. The article begins with a discussion of the continuum of professional forms found in the post-Second World War period and their relationship to different kinds of welfare states. It then focuses on the impact of recent neoliberal reforms on the ideological projects of the medical and allied health professions in the four case examples. The results show that variation across time and place is mainly the result of structural/economic factors and that various forms of professional discourses are the result of the public/private ways that healthcare systems are organized. The article concludes with suggestions for further comparative sociological research.

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professionalism